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REED SAXON, AP

He's the man. Arsenio Hall seemed to be saying as Bill Clinton jammed with the hand on Hall's TV show in June 1992, before Clinton was nominated to be the Democratic candidate for U.S. president.

The prez and the press

A boomer and a rock'n'roller – not to mention an adulterer who got outed – Bill Clinton was a horse of a different colour for the media. Objectivity got trampled, Juan Rodriguez says

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
Special to The Gazette

"Goodness, gracious, great balls of fire!"
—Jerry Lee Lewis, 1957

Bill Clinton was the first rock-'n'roll president. And R&B stands, above all, for S-E-X. Clinton's hero was Elvis Presley, rock's first sex symbol. The president's Secret Service code name was Elvis. Clinton even had a little music room in the White House where he kept his saxophones, a picture of Elvis on the wall. (He liked jazz, too – and besides being the name of the music, the word "jazz" means sex.)

When he hooked Hearthreak Hotel on Arsenio Hall's talk show while campaigning for the nomination in 1992, the pundits said he was "un-presidential." He won office anyway, but the press pooh-bahs – mostly baby-boomers like Clinton – set out to prove they were right in their judgment. It's as if they wanted to inoculate the Oval Office against rock'n'roll, wipe the nasty '60s clean, rewrite history.

"We were a counterculture, an American within America, arrogant, self-righteous, even jingoistic about our values, heroes and music," Joe Eszterhas has wrote in American Rhapsody, a wildly entertaining and weirdly complete generational account of Clinton's sexcapades. (A former Rolling Stone scribe, he also wrote Basic Instinct, the Sharon Stone leg-crossing movie Clinton loved.)

"I Can't Get No Satisfaction was our Battle Hymn of the Republic; Sympathy for the Devil our Star-Spangled Banner; Woodstock our D-day; Altamont our Pearl Harbor; Dylan our Elvis; Tim Leary our Einstein; Che Guevara our Patrick Henry.

"We did not have 'our' Richard Nixon. It was a shared faith among us that our generation, committed to letting it all hang out, to the truth setting us free, would never produce a Richard Nixon, a president who would look us in the eye, jab his finger in our faces, and lie."

MARTY LEDERHANDLER, AP

There was finger-pointing of another sort when President Clinton admitted his affair with Monica Lewinsky in August 1998.

and lie."

Joe Klein – who lied about being the "Anonymous" author of Primary Colors, his thinly disguised best-seller about Clinton's 1992 campaign – recently chided in the New Yorker: "His effulgent appetites seemed an almost comic exaggeration of the trials and temptations that afflicted his generation. To judge from his consistently high approval ratings in the polls, the public appeared to tolerate – and, perhaps, secretly enjoy – these unruly passions."

Indeed, Clinton leaves office with the highest approval rating of any postwar president.

But what about the boomer press's "effulgent appetites" for the mother of all U.S. sex scandals? Or does Klein want to have it both ways – acting like smarmy suck-up Eddie Haskell (teacher's pet on Leave It to Beaver) while playing with himself under the school desk?

Welcome to the legacy of William Jefferson Clinton.

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Interesting times in Quebec: a new chapter begins

MORDECAI RICHLER

Even a failed pseudo-revolution devours its own. One of ter another, René Lévesque, Pierre Marc Johnson, and now Lucien Bouchard, who also refused to ride with the most xenophobic of the PQ hounds, have been obliged to resign. In Bouchard's case, it came as no great surprise, because his return to private life had been rumoured for months. He is a complex man, easily the most cultured and charismatic of Canadian politicians since Pierre Elliott Trudeau, however contrary their political agendas. Charming, and able to enjoy jokes about himself in private, as I can testify, he could be transmogrified into a demagogue, fueled by an audience of enthusiasts. His intelligence undoubted, he had no trouble reading the political tea leaves. As he noted in his resignation speech, and as others had already observed, "Quebecers were astonishingly impassive in the face of federal offensives like the social union, the millennium bursary program, the creation of university research chairs, the adoption of Law C-20 (on referendum clarity)..."

Put plainly, the separatist tide was receding. Urged to call for yet another referendum by less prescient but forever fulminating hard-liners, Bouchard grasped that the numbers weren't there, and he didn't want to go down in history as the loser of Referendum III. In his resignation speech, the 62-year-old Bouchard, who six years earlier had lost a leg in a life-threatening encounter with a rare flesh-eating disease, alluded to his desire to spend more time with his wife and young children; and while denouncing the odious Yves Michaud for his boorish anti-Semitic prattle, he claimed, less convincingly, that this was not the reason for his resignation. However, without actually naming his nemesis, Jacques Parizeau, he did manage a dig at "several dozen personalities (who had) signed a public condemnation of the National Assembly resolution" denouncing Michaud, adjudging him an unsuitable PQ candidate. In other words, there is a dangerous split looming in the PQ ranks. And in the internecine struggles to come, the PQ's dark underside might yet emerge triumphant, a measure of that party's current desperation. If that's to be the case, Parizeau's infamous complaint about "money and ethnic votes" could, in retrospect, seem very mild beer. With only two, or at the most, three years left to the PQ in office, they could use that time to vengefully enact even more fatuous language laws. Measures, as Bouchard hinted in his speech, that "could hurt Quebec's reputation abroad." Making them vulnerable to ridicule, he might have added.

> **Charming, and able to enjoy jokes about himself in private, as I can testify, Bouchard could be transmogrified into a demagogue.**

Predictably, most Canadian politicians paid tribute of a sort to the departing Bouchard. New Brunswick Premier Bernard Lord noted that he had "lots of class," and Ontario's Mike Harris said: "I think Canada has lost a strong ally on provincial responsibilities on social programs." Only a still seething John Crosbie was more forthright: "I have to say he was a very destructive influence in Canadian politics. He's one of those largely responsible for the state the PC national party finds itself in today. He betrayed the prime minister (Mulroney) and also the party and he's been a destructive influence in supporting separatism in Quebec – although not as destructive as some of the hard-liners he's now leaving behind him."

Mulroney bolsted his Universite Laval chum into the cabinet, in 1984, even before Bouchard had been elected an MP. At his swearing-in, Bouchard said, "I don't like the word 'separatist.' You know it is a loaded word. It's not the reality. You know many people voted 'Yes' (in Referendum I) for negotiation ... I feel since Quebecers have decided in a democratic way that their future was within federation ... it is the duty of francophone Quebecers to make it work ... I am very proud to be a Canadian. I proved it possible to be a committed Canadian and Quebecer at the same time."

Later, after his latter-day conversion to the separatist cause, hard on the Meech Lake fiasco, he would, of course, get to complain vociferously about how "humiliated" Quebecers were within confederation. Happily, his own career would seem to be an exception to that rule. Sprung from a working-class family near Chicoutimi, he went on, albeit handicapped by his francophone origins, to become our ambassador to France and a prominent member of Mulroney's cabinet. And possible, just possibly, a future prime minister of Canada.

Luxuriating in a reputation for integrity, his initial campaign to be elected MP for Lac-Saint-Jean was tainted by Duplessis-like largesse, with Big Daddy Mulroney marrying the constituency with millions in grants, just in case.

Suspected of being a lukewarm separatist by hard-core members of the PQ, he just about brought off Referendum II, in 1995, rescuing it from the hands of a floundering Parizeau, who, I suspect, has never forgiven Bouchard for shunting him aside.

So now Quebecers are in for some interesting times. Jacques Parizeau redux, who has clearly missed being centre-stage; angry Bernard Landry; and Health Minister Pauline Marois, Our Lady of the Silent Toilets, are all party faithful, but, unlike Bouchard, will be unable to also attract soft-core nationalists.

There is also red hope. Fifteen young Quebec nationalists have signed an appeal in Le Devoir attacking those old-timers who support Michaud: "They emerge out of an ethnocentric and out-of-date nationalism. As such they stand opposite to the Quebec in which we want to live, based on respect, inclusion and openness. ...Quebec nationalists) must put aside, once and for all, this attitude of victimization and chase away intolerance, now embodied by French-Canadian nationalists, toward other Quebecers."

Daylight at last. And bravo, too, for Bouchard for disowning Michaud, saying: "... I have no taste for continuing any discussions whatsoever on the Holocaust and the vote of ethnic and cultural communities. I still don't understand how the linguistic debate turned into a comparative quantification of the suffering of the Jewish people, and the intolerance that Quebec citizens would show by not voting for Quebec sovereignty ... I am affirming, first, with absolutely no qualifications, that Quebec citizens can exercise their voting rights however they want ..."

So Lucien Bouchard retires from the political scene on a grace note. I wish him and his family well.

◆ *Last week's Mordecai Richler column was the first of two parts. Because of Lucien Bouchard's resignation, publication of the second part has been postponed until next week.*

JOE SCHWARCZ C4 ◆ DAVE BARRY C4 ◆ SOAPS C5 ◆ WHAT'S ON C6 ◆ XPRESS C10

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